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CURING, PICKING, AND HANDLING THE PEANUT CROP

The curing period is a critical time for peanuts. If improperly stacked or windrowed they may be badly weather damaged. While peanut growers must still depend upon field curing and contend with natural weather hazards, good stacking can overcome many of these hazards.

For a good picking job the vines and peanut pods must be dry. Brittleness, particularly of the slender attachments of peanuts to the plant, is a dependable test for determining proper picking time.

Generally, a four to five week period of drying weather is needed to cure peanuts which have been properly stacked. After peanuts have cured they may become temporarily damp due to rain or moisture. However, picking should never be attempted when the peanuts and vines are damp and tough. When properly cured, they may be ready for picking after a few hours of sunshine and wind.

With dry peanuts the modern picker will do an excellent job provided the machine is in good order, properly adjusted, operated at the correct speed, and fed slowly. A good picking job leaves peanuts practically free of dirt, trash, and stems. Their presence lowers the value of the peanuts and increases picking costs.

If peanuts are not perfectly dry when they come from the picker, they should be spread out on a canvas in the sun for a few hours or on a barn floor until dry.

Soil from which peanuts have been harvested is subject to erosion and leaching. A cover crop planted immediately after the peanuts are stacked will help prevent such losses and help restore fertility. In no case should the land be left bare during the winter. A good cover crop can be provided by planting winter legumes.

The Agricultural Conservation Program offers farmers assistance in establishing a satisfactory winter cover crop. See your local agricultural conservation committeeman for details.

(This is the fourth in a series of four suggested articles "Grow More Peanuts Per Acre". This material was prepared jointly by the Federal Extension Service; Bureau of Plant Industry, Soils, and Agricultural Engineering; and the Field Service Branch of Production and Marketing Administration.)

